

MEMOIR

OF

EDWIN HUBBELL CHAPIN, D.D., LL.D.

BY REV. ANSON TITUS.

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EDWIN HUBBELL CHAPIN.

EDWIN HUBBELL CHAPIN was born in Union Village, Washington County, New York, December 29, 1814, the son of Alpheus and Beulah (Hubbell) Chapin. He could trace his ancestry to the earlier days of the American colonies, through a line of worthy parentage; and in one of those masterly lectures he pronounced before so many audiences, in which he declares himself a "believer in ancestry and in the feeling it kindles," he expressed the tradition of his family that "a drop of the Black Douglas, the Scottish Knight, ran in his veins." Nobility of character and strength of lofty purpose were his, whether from Scottish veins, or the hardy blood of other peoples.

The paternal ancestry of Mr. Chapin reaches back eight generations, to Samuel Chapin,* who was among the early settlers about Boston, and who in 1642 took upon himself the fortunes of a wilderness home in Springfield. His wife was Cicely. Mr. Savage, in his *Genealogical Dictionary of New England Families*, says he was "a deacon and man of distinction." In a brief diary of his son Japhet are these words: "My father was taken out of this troublesome world the 11 day of November about eleven of the clock, 1675." The age of this paternal progenitor is not known, but it was above three score years. The eldest son of Samuel was Japhet, who married Aibilenah Cooley. Japhet resided in the north part of Springfield, the present Chicopee. He was at the Indian fight at Turner's Falls, as will be seen from the following note supposed to be in his handwriting in an ancient account book: "I went out Volenteare against ingens the 17th of May 1676 and we ingaged batel the 19th of May in the morning before sunrise and made great Spoil upon the enemy and came off the same day with a loss of 37 men and the

* For an account of the history of the Chapin Family, *vide* *The Chapin Genealogy*, containing a very large proportion of the descendants of Dea. Samuel Chapin, who settled in Springfield, Mass., in 1642. Collected and compiled by Orange Chapin, Northampton, 1866. pp. 367.

Few details remain of these years in Boston. His bright and imaginative mind caught upon suggestions and visions which lifted the young errand boy above the round of duty, and often to a neighboring errand boy would he recite some extempore effusion which had for the moment possession of his soul. The youth was turned towards the drama and histrionic art. Rude indeed may have been the execution of his endeavors; but gathering a small company of like passion he easily played the leading part. In this company of amateurs with young Chapin were Charles H. Eaton and John P. Addams, comedians, and E. L. Davenport, tragedian, whose brilliant delineations of the art made his fame world-wide. There was ever strength of friendship between Davenport and Chapin. Anxiety reigned in the hearts of the parents, and they, feeling the dangers which city life and excitement would have upon one of his temperament, arranged to have him go to Bennington, Vermont, and attend the Academy at that place. "When his little trunk was finally packed for the journey, his mother took from it sundry well-worn plays and declamations he had concealed in it, and in their place she deposited a copy of the Bible as her parting gift. Her cup of joy would have been full could she have foreseen how prophetic was this act of transfer!"*

Young Chapin's school days at Bennington were full of profit. The new life was overflowing with exhilaration. The fresh thoughts, the new associations, the broad and beautiful landscapes, a teacher who saw into the depths of his great nature, and inviting opportunities, conspired as one to lend aid to the unfolding of concealed powers. During the greater part of the six years he was in Bennington he lived with his uncle, Dea. Aaron Hubbell. It was while attending Academy that Mr. Chapin wrote the poem, which first appeared in the *Southern Literary Magazine*, entitled "The Burial at Sea," the first line of which ran,

"Bury me not in the deep, deep sea,"

and has in all the years of its wanderings found a place in the leading periodicals of our language.

From Bennington the young man went, in 1836, to Troy, N. Y., In the law office of Huntington and Van Schoonhoven he read Blackstone for a short time, and afterwards studied in the office of Judge Pierson. But he was not content with legal phrase. There was not enough of the poetic in it to suit his temperament. He would rather declaim the choice paragraphs of world-famed orators, than apply himself to the fine points and technicalities of law. The autumn of 1836 gave him grand days. He entered the Presidential campaign in the support of Martin Van Buren. Of Chapin's speeches in this campaign his old school-mate, the Hon. Martin I.

* Life of Edwin H. Chapin, D.D., by Rev. Sumner Ellis, D.D., page 24.

Townsend, says: "They were as successful in their line as his sermons were afterwards. Everybody patted him on the back and praised him for them. They were rough and tumble, but perfectly charming." This campaign was a life to him. It was a prophecy of his great work for the world. But blindly did he grope. Little did he know his mission; but He who rears men for special work and all the race for *some* work was entangling his life with thoughts and circumstances to guide him into and to persuade him concerning the labors and service of the world's Master among men.

The excitement of a political campaign over, and only the ordinary routine of studious plodding once more resumed, he grew tired and his temperament failed to respond to the niceties of legal study. He loved the stir and the responsive enthusiasm of public address. But there was more than this. His soul was reaching out for that which he did not possess. A religious revival was in progress in Troy, and his heart turned to subjects of spiritual life and growth. Religious thoughts were received favorably, but to him the dominant creeds and statements were hard to be reconciled. To the home of his parents he once more turned, and amidst the affections of loved ones his wearied heart began to feel refreshment. This home was now at Bridgewater, to the south of Utica, New York. His father plying his profession in Utica, the young man sought again a law office in which to pursue his studies. In a leisure hour he strolled to a book store, an attractive place to him, and there a kindly greeting and consent made him welcome. Connected with the store was a printing office. It was the publication office of the *Gospel Advocate* and *Magazine*, the organ of the Universalist denomination for New York State, and the books on sale were largely those which advocated the doctrines of this religious body. Here the student, with no money to purchase, found a place of pleasing resort. New thoughts and motives thrilled his soul. These books and publications, with a broad and generous spirit, aroused his nature, and a new man was he. The genial friendship awakened, and the attractiveness of an editorial room, were more seductive than the law office. On the first of July, 1837, his first article, an *Independence Hymn*, appeared in the columns of this paper. Soon he became established as an assistant editor, for his writings gained favor rapidly among the readers of his own and other papers. This labor gave him fresh joy. Until the following Spring did he remain in this position, developing rare powers as a writer. In Utica also there was a debating society this same winter, and there he often gave utterance to his thoughts on various subjects, to the admiration and profit of all who listened. In the Spring of 1838, Rev. Aaron B. Grosh, the senior editor, announced the accession to the Universalist ministry of him who had been his assistant. He was ordained to the full work of the Christian ministry September 27, 1838, at Knoxville, Oneida Co., New York.

In two months from the time of his first sermon, he was a settled pastor in Richmond, Virginia. College advantages and special theological training he did not possess, but with a rare power of grasping truths from every side, and with a happy faculty of applying them to his hearers, he soon captivated the hearts of the Virginians. His reputation as an orator of sacred truth began at the outset of his ministry. During his pastorate of two and a half years in Richmond he prepared a course or two of lectures which became the foundation of as many volumes of his published works.

In the autumn of 1839, Mr. Chapin came North to attend the Universalist General Convention in Portland, Maine. He arrived in Boston, September 13th, as the body of Rev. Thomas F. King was awaiting burial in Charlestown. Great grief was over the city. On the evening of this day a service was desired on the part of the people, and the visiting clergymen in attendance, who were, as was Mr. Chapin, on their way to the said Convention. Mr. Chapin was invited to preach, and consented. The preacher's words were of faith, and such was the pathetic and eloquent application to the pervading sadness, that to him did the people look for a future pastor. It was not, however, until more than a year after, that he consented to leave his Richmond charge. December 23d, 1840, he was installed as pastor of the Universalist Church of Charlestown, and for five years did he go in and out before his people with words of sympathetic ministration and a life which fired other hearts to better living.

It was in Charlestown that he said he lived his five most valuable years. His conquests and victories were many. The new avenues of research, the reforms of the time, his growing reputation upon the lecture platform, all called forth the nobler powers of his nature. During these plastic years, his labors and accomplishments, helpful as they were to others, yet exercised an abiding influence upon himself. In Charlestown he met in social life two intimate friends, who were such to the last, Richard Frothingham and Thomas Starr King. Large hearted and noble were these three men, and upon each other they exercised a superior type of influence. This ministry in Charlestown was widely felt, and it was only with a cost of painful emotion that his relations were severed to accept a call as an associate with the venerable Hosea Ballou of Boston.

Mr. Chapin was installed in Boston, January 26, 1846, the senior pastor, Hosea Ballou, delivering the sermon. Of this period of his life Rev. Sumner Ellis, D.D., his biographer, says: "His ministry in Boston was brief, reaching through a period of only two years, and was not marked by any thing special in the way of development or incident. Coming from Richmond to Charlestown, he had made in the latter place the great advance steps of his life. Under the shadow of Bunker Hill he caught a new vision of Liberty, and amidst the temperance agitation of that time he gave his heart

to Total Abstinence, and put his hand to the pledge; and for these great causes he became the eloquent advocate. Here also he had acquired a new and tenderer sentiment in his soul, a more pathetic tone to his voice, through the discipline of his first great sorrow,—an acquisition as permanent as his life; and here his moods of enthusiastic abstraction, in which his friends even failed to arrest his notice, became characteristic. And with these developments put forth, like buds burst into full bloom, he removed to Boston only to keep the even tenor of his way; or if any change came to him, it was merely a change to greater activity and influence, through the demand imposed by his growing fame."

While he was pastor in Charlestown, two urgent invitations had been given him to settle in New York City, and after a two years pastorate in Boston, came a renewed call he was unable to resist. On the first Sunday of May, 1848, he entered upon his new pastoral engagement. The same day Rev. Alonzo A. Miner, his successor, began in Boston. Their lines truly were fallen in divinely marked places. The busy and stirring life of the metropolis was best suited to the gifted Chapin, and the long successful pastoral career of Dr. Miner, as the leading Universalist minister in Boston, shows clearly to all readers of the divine mind, how a gracious Providence raises up men for stations, and creates stations for men. From the first, the ministry of Mr. Chapin in New York was attractive and ever widening. His reputation as an orator of sacred themes took anew the wings of the wind. First one church edifice and then another his congregation outgrew. His reputation as a lecturer made visitors to the metropolis desire to hear him upon the Sabbath day. The consequence was, no visit was complete without listening to him of whom so much was said. His parish grew in numbers and in wealth, and finally, in 1866, was erected the substantial and beautiful edifice—the Church of the Divine Paternity—on the corner of Forty-fifth Street and 5th Avenue. A succession of successes characterized his labors. No words, statement or statistics can estimate the worth, work and power of this mighty man in a leading pulpit of the leading city in the land. It were vain to attempt. On the 7th of May, 1873, he was invited by his large and generous minded people to celebrate his twenty-fifth anniversary* as their pastor. It was an event to be remembered. The people, to whom he was a true and steadfast friend, were present in large numbers. Addresses were made by various speakers of a congratulatory character, but the chief and central address was by Rev. Dr. James M. Pullman, who in apt, terse and eloquent words, presented Dr. Chapin, on behalf of his people, a sum of money, denominated "ten thousand" thanks.

The pulpit of this Church of the Divine Paternity was ever firm. It was true to the nobler reforms of the day, and loyal in the darker

* The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the settlement of E. H. Chapin, D.D., Pastor of the Church of the Divine Paternity, New York, Wednesday, May 7, 1873. 8vo. pp. 67.

times of the Nation's civil strife. No scandal ever breathed its poison against it. It has been a tower of strength amid men busy with the traffic of the world.

The Rev. Dr. Thomas J. Sawyer, at a memorial service in Boston, said of Dr. Chapin: "He was one of nature's noblemen; designed and fashioned to be a man of mark, with a large brain and a great heart. Physically, intellectually and morally, he was made for vast activity, endurance and most efficient service. Though dying at the age of sixty-six, he was fitted by nature to have lived much longer. No doubt he has accomplished by his intensity of thought and action, as much as many others with his endowments would have done in a life-time half as long again. But unfortunately for him, and for us, I think, he had no mercy on himself, and when in the hey-day of health and vigor he thought nothing impossible, no amount of labor too great. He was not merely a preacher. His was a divided throne between the pulpit and the platform. For many years he was active in temperance and other reforms, and his magnetic eloquence made him sought by all associations of the kind that desired the presence of a crowd and a stirring and persuasive appeal. For five and twenty years he was one of the most prominent of a long catalogue of lecturers whom every lyceum must hear. Now imagine a man who has to preach two sermons every Sunday, preach to an audience of from twelve to eighteen hundred people, and so preach as to maintain the reputation of the most eloquent divine in the country!"

In 1850 he visited Europe, and attended the Peace Congress held in the Parliament House of Germany, and his address here electrified the assembly, and gave him a reputation at once among the orators of Europe. His work for the Odd-Fellows earned the gratitude of all bound by their mystic tie. The cause of Temperance found his words of no little help in upbuilding the sentiments of total abstinence. There was no mistaking where his large sympathies were.

The services of Mr. Chapin were in constant demand before the Lyceums of the country. The first years of his ministry in Richmond witnessed his advent as a lecturer, and from that time onward he was "the acknowledged prince of the lyceum platform." The following named lectures are those upon which his reputation was established: "Orders of Nobility"; "Social Forces"; "Modern Chivalry"; "Building and Being"; "The Old and the New"; "The Roll of Honor"; "Man and His Work"; "Woman and Her Work"; "The People"; "The Age of Iron"; "Europe and America"; "John Hampden, or the Progress of Popular Liberty"; "Columbus," and "Franklin." At a time Mr. Chapin was asked what he lectured for, and he replied, "For f-a-m-e — fifty and my expenses." But this was in the early days of the Lyceum; later his prices reached the highest figures paid for lectures. The most popular of these lectures were doubtless delivered upon three or four hundred different platforms.

Although Dr. Chapin was connected with every charitable institution identified with the Universalist Church, the Chapin Home for the Aged and Infirm was the most intimately connected with the dead clergyman's work and with the Church of the Divine Paternity. The fund with which the Home was established was raised for a memorial of Dr. Chapin by different members of his congregation. The Home was incorporated on the 1st of May, 1869. The Board of Trustees was composed of ladies of Dr. Chapin's church. No candidate for admission to the Home is refused admission on account of creed or color. Both sexes are admitted, but the applicants must not be less than sixty-five years old. The institution owns its building on Sixty-sixth Street, near Lexington Avenue, which cost \$83,000 to erect, and other property of income-bearing value.

Dr. Chapin was a great lover of books. The choice things in old timed or recent literature were sure to be sought out by him. His library, after his decease, was sold, and its catalogue revealed a storehouse of literary treasures. Rarely has the sale of a private library attracted more general attention.

In addition to pulpit labors, pastoral obligations and the lecture platform, he was an author of works of more than ordinary value. These included several volumes of sermons, and works entitled: "Duties of Young Men," "Duties of Young Women," "Characters in the Gospel," "Hours of Communion," "Crown of Thorns," "The Beatitudes," "Moral Aspects of City Life," "Humanity in the City," "True Manliness," "A Token for the Sorrowing," "Discourses on the Book of Proverbs," "Discourses on the Lord's Prayer," "Extemporaneous Discourses," "Lessons of Faith and Life," "Living Words," and "Providence and Life." These volumes have had extensive sale, and the writer, though dead, through these is still speaking words of love, light and hope.

In 1856 Harvard University conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, and in 1878 Tufts College the degree of Doctor of Laws.

Mr. Chapin, ever serious in his address, manner and life, yet was a man who loved wit, and himself was a wit of no mean repute. Henry Ward Beecher said "his wit flashed like the spokes of a wheel in the sun." From his biography we quote several witticisms. "In the midst of an out-door speech at College Hill, on an occasion, as the cars of the Lowell Railroad went thundering by only a few rods from him, and confused alike speaker and hearer, he instantly observed, "It is difficult to conduct a train of cars and a train of remarks at the same time. It is a train of circumstances unfavorable to a train of thought."

Limping along the street by aid of a cane, and suffering a twinge at every step from a rheumatic foot, he was met by one who sought to engage him in a religious conversation, and led off by asking him if Universalists did not believe that people got their punishment as

they went along. "Yes, that's my case exactly," said he, and hobbed away, leaving the inquirer to ponder on the wisdom of the reply.

Sitting down one day on Rev. Dr. Emerson's stove-pipe hat, he instantly rose and passed the crumpled thing to its owner, saying, "You ought to thank me for that, for your hat was only silk, but now it is *sat-in*."

The pulpit was Chapin's real throne; thus truly says his biographer. Great as were his lectures, and oratorical efforts upon the platform, yet in his pulpit before his own people, speaking upon the great themes of duty, life, immortality and destiny, his large nature and gifted powers surpassed. Rev. I. M. Atwood, D.D., of Canton Theological School, Canton, New York, says: "For while we do not claim the highest place among the great for Dr. Chapin, his fame makes it idle for any one to deny him an eminent place. He was not a great originator, like Augustine or the Elder Ballou; nor a great scholar, like Origen or Cudworth; nor a great thinker, like Jonathan Edwards or Horace Bushnell; nor a great organizer, like Wesley; nor a great agitator, like Theodore Parker. Dr. Chapin was a *great preacher*. He belongs to the same range with Chrysostom, Bourdaloue, Bossuet, Whitefield, Chalmers, Beecher—the great pulpit orators of the world. In some particulars it is probable every one of these surpassed him. It is not an extravagant supposition that in some particulars he was their superior." And in comparing him with the acknowledged masters of eloquence in our generation, he further says: "Certain it is that on every platform, after all the oratorical princes had competed for the crown and Chapin was summoned, there never was any dispute as to who was king. In uplifting, thrilling, overpowering, unreportable eloquence, he left all contemporaries far behind him."

The health of Mr. Chapin was declining for some years, and it was becoming apparent that he was slowly failing under the burden of his labors and advancing disease. A generous people gave him opportunities of rest and travel in Europe, hoping to stay the progress of his complaints. But the offers of friendship, change of air or skill of physician availed little, and after months of steady decline he died December 26, 1880.

Mr. Chapin married in Utica, N. Y., October 15, 1838, Miss Hannah Newland, who only survived him seven months, dying July 22, 1881. Three children, Frederick H. Chapin, Sidney H. Chapin, M.D., and Mrs. Marion G. Davison, and five grandchildren, are now living.

The biography of Dr. Chapin was prepared in the autumn of 1882, by Rev. Sumner Ellis, D.D., of Chicago, and was noticed in the REGISTER, Volume xxxvii. p. 420. It was published by the Universalist Publishing House, Boston, to which we are greatly indebted

for the use of the excellent portrait of Dr. Chapin. This biography, in our notice of it, is characterized "as a model of its kind. It is a worthy tribute to the memory of him whose earnestness and eloquence went far to mould and fashion the thought and life of to-day."

The last services and tributes over the remains of Dr. Chapin were simple, appropriate and touching. Evidences came from every side of the fraternal spirit cherished towards him by all, irrespective of creed or denomination. The secular press over the world, not limited to the English speaking nations, were hearty in according him a foremost place in the realm of oratory. His funeral took place December 30th, at the Church of the Divine Paternity. The brief services at his residence were conducted by his friend Rev. C. H. Fay. The services at the church were in charge of Rev. James M. Pullman, D.D., for many years closely associated with him as a neighboring pastor of the same denomination. The opening prayer was offered by Rev. Elmer Hewitt Capen, D.D., President of Tufts College, and remarks of a consolatory and eulogistic nature were made by the Revs. Robert Collyer, Henry Ward Beecher, Thomas Armitage, and Rev. Dr. Pullman, who also closed the service with prayer. The remains were then borne to their last resting place in Greenwood, the beautiful city of the dead.

Memorial services were held in Boston, Charlestown, Cambridgeport, and other places, while there was scarcely a preacher in all the churches of New York and Boston who did not make allusion to the departure of this strong Christian orator. In Boston, a special service took place at the Columbus Avenue Universalist Church, Rev. Dr. A. A. Miner, pastor, which was very largely attended by old time parishioners and persons drawn by their love and admiration of the man, preacher and orator. The addresses upon this occasion were by Revs. Thomas J. Sawyer, S.T.D.; Charles Follen Lee; his Excellency, John D. Long, Governor; his Honor, Frederick O. Prince, Mayor of Boston, and the Rev. A. A. Miner, his successor as pastor of the Church.

The press was generous in all its notices. The same columns usually filled with secular matters spoke praises for the dead orator and preacher. The Brooklyn *Times* said, "His pure and classic eloquence and the solid erudition and logical clearness of mind placed him in the high rank among metropolitan preachers." The New York *Tribune* said, "His intellectual qualities were of a high order. His sermons were satisfying in substance as well as singularly fine in rhetoric. Probably no one ever heard him preach without carrying away in his memory some beautiful thought in a golden setting of words." The New York *Times* spoke thus: "As a preacher, Dr. Chapin was ripe, scholarly, eloquent. His sermons, while abounding in original thought, were polished to the last degree, and in language as in sentiment were models of elegant and perspic-

uous English." The Brooklyn *Eagle* voiced truthful words: "The American pulpit never possessed a sturdier brain, nor a more expansive catholic heart, than the brain and heart whose mortal record ended when Edwin H. Chapin died."

This brief sketch gives but a glimpse of a most noble career, whose every power was consecrated to the enlarging of the kingdom of a Master to whose service his life was devoted.

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